In My Mind

Thoughts and Words of Andrew Bloomfield 2000-2006

"I like to write poems.
It is like a song in my mind."

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I want to share with all my friends some of the thoughts I have been able to express during the past seven years.

Two people have been important allies in my communicating the thoughts and words in this collection. One is my friend Beth with whom I have met regularly since March 2000. We had known each other years ago but reconnected after separately discovering Facilitated Communicating during the 1990s.

By sharing her great gift of music, my friend Sunny helped me to speak my thoughts in words that could be poems and songs. Sunny set four of my poems to music before she had to return to Korea.

I am also thankful to dear friends who first introduced me to FC in 1991 and supported my communication through the 1990s in various ways--Martha, Susan, Shelley, Karen and Vickie.

In the 1990s, I used to speak of myself in the third person, as "AB" or "he"—not as "I" and "me." Now I use "I" all the time, and very often the phrases "I think" and "in my mind." Since 2000, I also express myself at greater length.

Some people who read what I have composed are absolutely amazed. I am glad that they realize that autistic people are smart and that I do like to use words. But I feel modest about my poetry or wisdom.

Andrew, November 2006

From Elizabeth and Gerry:

The words in this little book are all Andrew's. We would like to add some of ours here, about his powers of self-expression.

First, our admiration of Andrew's courage and determination. For someone with movement disorders, FC or supported communication is a great and wonderful gift. But it is physically and mentally demanding and emotionally draining. The communicator must deliberately persist in typing his intended meaning against the backward resistance provided by the facilitator. Even on his hardest days, when fine motor skills are affected by his frozen and stuck nervous system, Andrew perseveres heroically, as does his facilitator. That he can communicate at all is a phenomenon.

Second, Andrew's words are full of good sense, as well as gentle humour and kindness. He is always surprising us--with perceptions, choice of words, irony and suggestions, that we would miss without FC. It is vital for his self-direction of his person-centred support plan. Being able to "speak" his thoughts and to know he is listened to, he can be content and less anxious.

Third, Andrew clearly thinks about other people, wanting to share what he has learned and experienced. He wants his life to have meaning, illustrated in his dream and practical plans for Bridges Over Barriers, and his willingness to share his experience of being a pioneer.

The ideas in Andrew's mind give us joy in the life we share with him.

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Thirty-eight poems by Andrew are arranged within the above outline, including: What makes me the person I am? Communicating my way, Saying it with my hands, FC is my bridge to the world, Words, About being an FC poet, What it's like to be me, Blessing for friends, Friends new and old, Friends old and new, My friend Ken, Gerry's home, To Beth my bridge, Connections, Anticipation, My excellent life, What I like about Guelph, Spring, Winter, Music is good for my soul, Hillside in my mind, Trains, Thanks for the farm, Sense of God, Seeing the miracles all around, A place of peace, Individualized Funding, Dreaming of what might be, Bridges Over Barriers, Autism is a narrow window, Hope, Acceptance for acceptors.

See the back cover for details of other publications by or with Andrew, and for how to support his vision of Bridges Over Barriers.

What are my defining characteristics?

(10 May 2006)

I am interesting
and interested in things.
I like to be a leader,
but our group is full of leaders
in their own way.
I lead in ideas and new things.
I am strong,
even if my body tries to defeat me.
I am poetic, so I hear—
(I mean, so I am told by others.
I just say my feelings in pretty words).

I like to host.
I get what I give. I give what I get.

(25 September 2002)

I am independent but dependent.
I like to look after myself as much as I can.
I like to walk Amy.
I like to help cook.
I like to be busy.
I like to work in the outdoors.
I like to work with people who teach me.
I need help to be my best.
I need friends, supporters to keep my life moving.

What makes me the person I am?

(10 May 2006)

I think it is a combination of things.

My parents' example.
My parents' and sister's love and support.
My friends' support.

My experiences, good and bad.
I mean learning FC
and being away from home.

Learning with Heidi
and talking with Beth.
Working with Kaitlin
and others like Roberta and Minerva.

It is a lifelong process
becoming a person.

I am just about the most exuberant person I know. My body sometimes brings me down and I get too focused on it. I need to count my blessings when I am down, more than when I am up. I do think of them. I am reminded that I have so many blessings. If I am asked to make a list and to count them, it might help (28 September 2005).

What is communication?

(13 September 2006)

I think it is opening your mind,
to let others inside
to know you,
and what you think
and believe and feel.

It feels like a door opens,
so the world can understand me,
and I have a chance
to be in the world—
I mean out in the world,
as I am who I am.

It is as if—
the more I communicate,
the more I think.

In my mind, FC is the most important exercise I get—for my mind and hands, and also exercising my right to be heard. I want to be able to talk with more friends. FC is more important than ever. Someone in my circle needs to FC with me (23 November 2000).

I need Facilitated (or supported) Communicating to express my thoughts and feelings. Choices can be done other ways, but I can elaborate on the choices only with FC. I need FC support more often with people who are good at it. And then I could maybe do more independently. I know I am not seen as high-functioning. I think that my definition of high-functioning and the

professionals' definition may not be the same. To them it means to be independent, verbal and social. I feel a difference in working with people who believe in me from those who think I'm a charity case. I need that belief to encourage me and the positive energy that comes from the other person is enabling. When I work with people who do not believe in me, I get paralyzed, disabled: negative energy is crippling. I compose and type my own words, but it is part of the dance of my life with my facilitator. Your positive energy and your attitude free me (28 September 2005)

I need to use FC daily to get thoughts out. To talk doesn't need an appointment (15 May 2000).

Communicating my way

(26 February/12 March 2003)

It is a very special thing
to communicate,
with love and support of a friend,
who sits by your side,
and who touches your hand
and your heart.

I thank you for being my friend,
For touching me and being by my side.
I thank you for communicating with me
My way and your way.

A really good facilitator tries to feel everything that I feel. She does the supporting, and pulling back of my hand. I do the moving, pointing, spelling (17 April 2000).

I was locked before. FC is so liberating (9 Oct 2002). When others did not understand me, I was sad and frustrated and agitated all the time. I got angry and sad. I was hopeless. I never expected to find a better way. I was very surprised by FC. I knew I could spell and read. But I had no way to show it. A few intuitive people really looked inside and past my autism (16 July 2003).

Until FC I did not know I thought in words. Just was absorbing (17 April 2000). Now I have thoughts. Now I can talk. The thing everyone yearns for is really good support to communicate (27 April 2000). I want to say that my life is better if I am using FC (20 July 2000).

Saying it with my hands

(14 September 2005)

My day is full of thoughts and dreams,
I move from place to place.
I have in my mind these words:
I need your help sometimes
to get them out.

In your hands I can say it all.
My hand in your hand,
I can really spell it out for you,
And anyone else who wants to listen.

To FC with me, you need to believe in me. I need to have as much emotional support as physical support (15 May 2000).

FC is my bridge to the world

(December 2003)

FC is not a cure but a bridge.
I'm thinking that the bridge took me
from the island
to the mainland.
I am connected
to the one I am FCing with
and she connects me to others.

Before FC, I had to hope others
would see in my eyes and behaviour,
but these were not reliable.
I saw that nobody really knew
how smart I was,
but I had no way to express myself.
It felt like I was observing my own life
but not controlling it.
I was sad, and at times frustrated,
if I needed to say something....
I remember the first time I used FC,
when I spoke for the first time
in words that made sense.

I think I am visiting the mainland,
not living there.
I think visiting is fine.

People ask me if I think in pictures like Temple Grandin. No, I think in words (12 December 2003).

Words *(15 September 2004)*

Words are our way
of reaching each other.
In words I tell my story.
I say who I am,
and who you are to me.

My words can sail to you,
or hit their mark like a dart.
I tell you I love you,
or complain if I'm hurt.

I'm grateful I found my way
to share words,
very grateful indeed.

About being an FC poet

I am learning to be a poet.
My words begin in my heart
And go to my head.
I let them flow on out of my hands,
with the guiding holding hand
of my facilitator,
on to the keyboard,
and out comes the voice.
Not my voice,
but as close as I will get
to reciting my poems out loud.
(18 August 2004)

I'm asked if I compose my poems in advance in my head. No, they are spontaneous, not planned. (18 June 2003).

What it's like to be me

(29 January 2003; set to music)

I'm a bundle of sensations:
I get the urge
to touch and pick,
and I must follow my urges.

Can you see my urges?
I can't tell you:
I just show you.

I'm a bundle of nerves,
and a jumble of thoughts.
I'm in constant motion,
and my mind's always going.

I wonder what it's like to be you.
Do you wonder what it's like to be me?
I'm a time bomb waiting to explode,
and a tear waiting to fall.

When I feel well, more of myself is showing through (27 October 2004). I have a pretty good life. I do have an excellent life. I'm in an inexcellent body though (27 April 2005). In the good times, I feel so well it is like a dream. My life is like new. I am just happy to be alive. I am just about the most exuberant person I know (28 September 2005). In dreams it is sometimes like I am not autistic. I think I have happy dreams sometimes (16 November 2005).

I'm in a light-hearted mood today. I think it's the weather and the events in my life. I think it's the

collective of them. Just quiet. Mellow listening to my heartbeat and the music. I think I'm just enjoying the mood I'm in (9 October 2002).

I have to struggle with my body every day (14 April 2004). About half the time, I can keep things under control and make my body do what my brain wants. But other times I have tailspins and go spinning downward (15 November 2006). I mean losing my body's ability. I can't move. I am rigid. I can be frozen and stuck for up to two weeks. There have also been terrible hyperactive and sleepless times, when I can't hold it together. These are less often now that I am very careful with my diet, sensory system and sleep. But anxiety or shock can upset me. I have grand mal seizures every couple of months.

These are some of the sensations I have:

The worst thing in that hard month was feeling like my body was not part of me. I thought I was seeing myself from outside. I felt it was like my thoughts were not from my head (31 January 2005).

In the days before the seizure, I was in a sad and insecure mood. Both body and mind. I think unanchored is a good way to say it (3 August 2005). I feel that my brain is in a fog (14 September 2005). Feels like a hurricane in my head and ears (2 November 2005). Just before a seizure, I feel dizzy and light as a feather. Like I am about to let go of my awareness. But I get fuzzy at other times with no seizure, so how can I tell?

I have only half a second when I know I'm having a seizure. I cry out loud in alarm, to get help. I am surprised that my voice comes out so loud (25 July 2001).

In my seizures, my head feels open like the wind through it. I do like how I am after a seizure and a sleep. I feel swept clean. No cobwebs (March 2005). It's like a shock that recharged me. I feel lighter and clear-headed like a fog has lifted (29 January 2003).

My head is heavy. Yes, like a weight. On top and my forehead hurts. It comes and goes. I have had it before in hard times. I feel unable to sit or stay still. It's in my body. I feel like I need to keep moving or I will get upset. I need to hold my hands over my ears to keep in control of my urges (27 July 2005).

I felt out of control. I had to hold on for dear life. I did feel that the world was much too noisy. It was all annoying and painful (7 Dec 2005).
I hold my hands over my ears a lot. No it is a defence mechanism, as much as pain. I'm saying: make it stop (2 Nov 2005).

I'm kind of tired. My brain is rattled. Inside it is jumbled. I feel disoriented. My head is like popcorn. I want to keep going. It might help. My ears are really all right. Today I think I'm holding them because I'm tense. Eyes don't hurt. Not mouth, neck, shoulders or back. No, I think it's all in my brain. I think it is my brain reacting to chemistry (24 December 2003).

It feels like being in a tunnel with no light or air. It was dark. It was tight and the air was thin. I couldn't breathe normally. My chest was tight. It was tiring and long. I think the tunnel is hard to talk about. It's not predictable, so I'm not able to tell you it is coming. I think I know only when I am in it. I don't sleep so well.

It never seemed to near the end though I knew it would end. It was frustrating. I was tired. I was in a decline because the weather has been so weird. Hot humid weather makes my head feel worse. It helps and comforts me, when others go through the tunnel with me, but it's no faster or sooner to get to the other end (26 June 2002).

My body is a heavy weight and my brain is in a cloud of fog. If I am glad, I can't show it. My shoulders are heavy and weighed down. My stomach feels jumpy (8 January 2003).

I am not feeling myself yet. So please bear with me. I'm just feeling bad in my head. I'm higher than a kite (13 March 2002).

When I'm worried and not knowing what's happening, I don't think so well. I was agitated. I had my very awful jumping and yelling and noises. Losing it. Yes. I was coping but then I think I needed to walk or exercise. Not doing enough. I just had too much anxiety. Not enough exercise to get it out. Worse if people yell at me. It helps to lie under my weighted blanket, if I can get there, and optional books too. Bouncing and rocking can get me out of a stuck place (29 September 2004).

I'm out of sorts. I'm worried about losing control. I'm anxious about holding it together. Holding up my arms I think is a staying in control posture (13 October 2004).

I want to try but my body isn't co-operating. I think the day is perfectly awful. I'm not feeling in control. I feel jumpy all over in and out (1 December 2004).

I want to tell them that we all lose it sometimes in different ways I guess. I get hyper and run and scream and clap if it is bad (18 August 2004).

I can't smile, I can't sign, I can't FC, I can't tell you that my behaviour is involuntary. I can't help it! (7 June 2006).

The new clothes are like adjusting to new skin. I feel them all over. I get to know them and they begin to feel familiar and they even smell like me. It is true that being used to the clothes is most of the issue. It is good to have time to get used to the idea by seeing them and touching them and having them around (12 August 2002).

The impulses are always there—latent, but we people with autism can hold on most of the time, and not lose control or explode. Other people should know that it is always a struggle, even when there may be no outward sign. We all lose it sometimes in different ways. But we work out strategies that help. For me, my diet and sensory integration, long walks and other exercise, social stories, and understanding friends all help (September 2006).

Friends are my life support

I hear that autistic people are not thought to be able to make or value friends.

For me, making friends may be hard until they respect how I communicate and listen to what I say. But I certainly value friends as my life support, my safety net, and life's greatest blessing.

I need my friends to help me carry out my dreams and intentions. I want them to listen deeply to me so they really understand that I am smart, that I try to control the impulses of my inexcellent body, and that I want to be a good and generous friend myself.

I particularly need friends because our family is so small, since the death in 1996 of my lovely sister and best friend.

I am so glad that my friends spend time with me and offer me experiences of work and recreation. They share parts of their lives and thoughts with me. Here are some thoughts about just a few of my friends.

I am also grateful that friends have enriched my life through my support circle (and its incorporated core, FAB for Friends of Andrew Bloomfield) and Guelph Services for the Autistic (GSA) that owns my home in trust for me.

Since 2004, I have also a new circle of friends in our support group, Bridges Over Barriers.

Blessing for friends

(August 2004)

Bless this group of friends
who want to share with me
and with each other.
Make us strong
and help us to be safe with each other.

My friends are my life support:
I love them all.
It's like having a loving safety net,
with you as my special friends.

My friends new and old

(June 2004)

My friends touch me in so many ways:
My friend Sunny touches me with music,
Heidi with art and learning,
Laurie new but gives me her attention.
Beth touches me with her hands
and lets my words come forth.

My new friends, when we gather,
touch me with their desire
to share life's journey.

I think that my blessings are that you all stand by my side no matter what. I think you all try so hard to get me through life and I am thankful (24 July 2002).

Old friends and new

(4 December 2002, first intentional poem and song—honouring Kaitlin)

I love the way you are,
in the barn,
in the sunshine,
with the horses.
It is beautiful
to be with you,
and beautiful
to see your smile.

I love to hear you laugh,
in the barn,
in the sunshine,
and I hear you saying
"Perrfect" in my mind.

Old friends and new
you are among
the most beautiful to me.

What I like about Kaitlin are her energy and her kindness and her love of horses (24 April 2002).

I like to do things that are active but have meaning, and friends to do it with. I like horse work with Kaitlin and my other Spirit Valley friends. Half of it is work I can do and half is who I'm with. I like outdoor work in a team (9 October 2002).

My friend Ken *(May 2005)*

Ken is a gentle man.
He brings a sense of quiet
and calm happiness to me,
when he visits.
I like his smile,
and his attitude of giving us
a sense of his inside.
He is a welcome guest in my home.
I hope to have his company whenever
possible.

Gerry's home *(September 2005)*

I do like having him home:
It's so much better for us all.
It's the way we are used to being:
The way we are meant to be.
It is family,
It is comfort.
It is my world intact and
My life at its best.
I am glad Gerry is home.

To Beth, my bridge *(21 Jan 2004)*

I think that you are a bridge to me
and you need a bridge too sometimes.
I hope there is a bridge in your life too.
I hope that you cross the bridge
and find the sun in your face.
I hope you feel the wind in your face
Over the bridge.

Connections

(May 2005)

Connecting is my purpose in life,
It is why we are here.
My world is connecting the dots:
You are one dot,
I am another.
We live in a world of connections,
and the lines spread out from here.

Connecting is like
building a bridge of love,
I reach you with words in a way.

Anticipation

(15 February 2006)

I love waiting for you to come:
In my mind I prepare,
I plan our time together.
I feel anticipation,
wondering how it will be.

It is love for you
and all I am with you
that stirs me to do well.
Your love and faith inspire me,
and I love and have faith in you too.

I dedicate today to you.

My Amy *(12 March 2003; my guide dog; set to music by Sunny)*

My Amy is a treasure,
She is my companion,
My guide,
My friend,
My maker of friends.

My Amy is a wagger
and a dear one to me,
She is soft and magnificent to see.

My Amy is always with me.
My Amy is a presence,
My constant companion,
My friend.

You are a gift to me.
I hope I am to you as well.

I have a dog whose name is Amy. You might think she is a seeing-eye dog. She is my service dog. Amy is in my plan because I am in need of companionship and she holds me to the path. She is my friendmaker. I can have more independence and dignity, and need not be supervised all the time by other people.

Amy stays with me all the time. I feed her and look after her. She knows my signs and sounds, and my moods. She barks when someone she does not know comes to the door. I think she knows if I am not well, and she stays close by.

Amy can call people if I need help. We can be in another part of my home for two hours or so. We can look after the house for short times. Holding on to Amy helps my sense of balance and makes me more comfortable in new or strange situations.

We can go anywhere together, as we have a special card saying we are a licensed Public Access Team. Amy goes everywhere I go. She walks the streets with me and goes on buses with me. We can go by train too.

Once a week we go to the Seniors' Home. We do pet therapy. That means it makes the older people feel happier to see her. It makes me happy to know I can help someone else because I have to receive help from so many myself.

I think Amy bridges the gap between me and the rest of the world. I mean to say that she alerts me to the presence of others and her appearance makes others want to interact with me. I look after her and having to do that makes me stay more aware of traffic and hazards on my way.

Amy is my friendmaker. She is so cute and friendly, and people who might be nervous about talking to me are drawn to her. It's not like with guide dogs who you mustn't talk to.

Amy and I can walk independently around my neighbourhood. But, to be more independent in the community, we really need a tracking device that tells us to go home when we may walk too far, and could also tell my friends where we are. (March 2005)

What makes a good day?

I think a good day is when I can get things done in my own way (16 June 2004).

A good day, now and in the future, should include the things that are in my plan (October 1996):

- *my own home shared with people I choose*
- *a coordinator like Elizabeth*
- *deliberate structure, planned days, some predictability*
- *ways to communicate my wants and needs and to interact meaningfully with others*
- *friends of various ages, circumstances and interests*
- *an interesting life of balanced activities (various kinds of learning and real work)*
- *exercise outdoors and relaxation indoors*
- *caring for my home, garden and dog*
- *keeping up with the news and being a good citizen*
- *health care including my special diet and sensory integration strategies*

Yes, we got them all except my soul--music, prayer, meditation (8 November 2000).

Being Content (November 2004)

It feels so nice this being content.
It is balance and good health.
It is love and friendship.
It is feeling secure and safe.
I am content and I thank you for that.

My excellent life *(2 July 2003)*

People should know
what a wonderful home I have
and the things I do every day.
I have my own home
and it revolves around me.
I know everyone who comes here
is friendly to me.

My parents, my aroha and GSA
listen to me and respect my decisions.
I think I am comfortable and safe here.

My garden is heaven on earth.
It is a friendly neighbourhood.
I get out a lot and they see me.
I like to greet people;
I try to smile.
Amy is my friendmaker,
It was a real adult accomplishment
to use my key to open the front door.

I'm happy with our progress.
Well planned and not stressful.
I grow into each step.

I'm feeling great in fact. I'm trying to get more relaxed by focusing on the positive. We try really to face our difficulties but maybe I should find everything that is good. I need a strategy to list positive things, my blessings (11 June 2000). My parents who love me and pioneer, my friends, FC, work, learning (29 August 2004).

What I like about Guelph

(July 5, 2006)

I like it that
the people here are friendly
and it is quieter than Toronto.
Amy is welcome everywhere
and the bus drivers are nice.
I like to go on buses if it is not hot.
I like the parks and trails.
Swimming pools for public swim
are too loud and crowded.
I want the public pools but more space.

Guelph can be a leader, like me.

Learning is a blessing—reading, typing, studying new things. I feel like I want to learn about the way the brain works, and what's different with autism. Please get some reading material for me to do that (20 July 2000).

Our ideas keep coming. I think lots of people learn only when they are young. I want to keep learning so many things (7 February 2001).

I'd like to learn about the universe. I need physics and the way things fit together. I'd like to know how atoms and molecules interact (16 January 2002).

I'm interested to learn about the environment and how we can save it, I mean the welfare of people and the planet. Help me to read please! (December 2004)

Reading is relaxing. I want to read about the lives of persons with autism. I want to read about a person who has said something worthwhile. I want to start with Temple. I want to read writings of other people with autism--about coping strategies and friendmaking (3 March 2004).

Spring *(26 March 2003; set to music)*

What a time it is
when the light changes
and the sun comes
back to us in fullness
It is a time of beginning again
and coming outside
to see the world again.
The world is washing itself off
with the rain,
And soon new things will appear
growing and showing off for us.

Winter *(22 December 2004)*

This time of year
The weather is all we talk about:
It's cold,
There's snow,
There's rain and wind,
It is blustery, even chills our bones.
Let's stay in and keep warm.
I don't mind the cold
But others like to be in with me
And that warms me inside.

Work

I don't mind collating work as volunteer for organizations if I like my partners and my surroundings (8 November 2000).

I want to do more work, like the delivery idea. I need time to get up in the morning, so delivering a morning paper is not good. I like the idea of delivering for a pharmacy. It would help people in need. Please keep me informed. I like the lawn work. Not the snow shoveling for others, but shoveling is fine here. I like the mower I have. I could work again at the park, cleaning up (28 August 2002).

Working feels good. I liked delivering the Tribune. I think it got me to meet my neighbours and to have them see me being useful and productive (26 November 2003).

I want to work for four hours a day; just one for pay. It's because I have other things to do--gym, bowling, cooking, walking, dinner parties (9 January 2004).

Exercise

Yes I do like to work out. I feel better. It makes my brain work better. I like to walk in all weather. I am better than the postman! (17 October 2004).

Cooking

I made a perfectly wonderful thing. I might learn to cook so I could serve my housemates. I think stirfries are fun. I use a chopper. I like quiet tools. I like the idea of making my own things. I like hosting in my home (30 October 2002).

Music is good for my soul

(March 2003)

I really like my time with Sunny,
I think she is lovely to be with.
She is sunshine in my life already,
I can see a bright time together
She is musical and spiritual
and gentle and kind.

The music is good,
It is good for my soul.
The creating,
The release of ideas and feelings,
and hearing the music.
I do like the drum and cymbals.
No right or wrong,
just feeling it and doing it.
I like the completing
of the musical thought,
I like the finishing better.
I like the songs Sunny sings.
I like to listen to them later.

Friends need to defy odds (8 May 2000).

I'm in a good space for learning new things. New experiences and thoughts. I'm interested in numbers. Our aptitude. I'm referring to autistic people (9 October 2002).

Hillside in my mind

(August 2003, Guelph's outdoor music festival)

I like to think that Hillside
is an experience
that is always with me.
It is atmosphere
and all the music
and all the people
that make it so.
I think the experience is about
making something musical
and exciting happen there.
I feel a part of something alive there;
it is like I can be a part of the music.

People like me there and accept me.
I want to thank them all.
I want to go forever
as long as it happens.
I think Hillside is special
because it is only one yearly.
It is not possible to recreate it.
Out of doors makes it easier
to deal with so many people.

It was fun to be at the Jazz Festival with John. It didn't leave me anxious as some years. I like jazz because it is alive music. It has life and movement. Hillside is my favourite of the regular activities of the summer (September 2002).

Trains *(15 December 2004)*

Trains move me in many ways:
I like to be moving with them.
My movement problems
are inconsequential
because the train
speeds along the track
in the right direction.
It feels like the motion
becomes a part of me
and I am part of it.
The sounds calm my nerves
and I am happy.

Trains *(8 March 2006)*

I love the feel of train rides:
It is motion in my bones.
My brain feels liberated,
and I am free as a bird.
The air moves;
the train hums
and vibrates.
It is old world
and new world
coming together.
People on trains are friendlier:
You can't talk to people in cars on highways.

Idea of farm community

I know that farms are places I like to be. They give me open space, acceptance, nature and chances to work. I think that farm places are good for friendship with animals and people. It is more spiritual maybe. I mean you breathe and are closer to God or a heavenly space.

A place to visit and work and make friends. I think I would like to help it grow. I could deliver organic foods to people in town (14 April, 28 October 2004).

Thanks for the farm

(19 July 2006)

David's farm is a place of love:
It welcomes me with open arms.
He leads us to the barn and
around the fields with Barney.

I am moved by the meal
at his grandmother's table,
with Beth smiling at me
and making food for us all.

I remember friends joining hands
to say "Thank you" to God,
and I say thanks for people like you.

Spirituality

I want to tell you about my conversation with Heidi. It was touching my soul. We talked about spirituality. I think that autistic people need spiritual care. I can really tell you that we have feelings for others. I need to have spiritual moments. My soul is nourished (24 Jan 2001).

I need more readings of great words and meditations. I'd like my friends to send me words or mantras that have meaning for them (4 April 2001).

I'm interested in the afterlife. After death, I think that the soul leaves the body and floats above us. They watch over us but can't help much (24 August 2002).

I want to send spiritual thoughts out to friends once a week. If you show me a selection of blessings, I will choose. I could choose a subject from my head for the first. People as blessings (12 December 2003).

Sense of God *(4 February 2004)*

I have in mind that
I feel God in my life these days.
I think God likes
our messages
and our home.
I wonder if God sees everything?
I think God is everywhere
and in all of us.

Andrew Foster introduced me to my church, Westminster-St Paul's in Guelph, in 2001. Early in 2005, he asked if we could work together on an article about my spiritual sense for The Presbyterian Record. The article appeared as "Loving people is loving God" in May 2005. This poem is based on my thoughts for that article.

Seeing the miracles all around

(March 2005, October 2006)

By seeing the miracles all around
and counting my blessings,
I feel a sense of spirituality in my soul.
Our lives are very soulful.
We listen in our family.
I think I am often in the presence
of spiritual people, so it rubs off.

I think I hear an inner voice in my head
that is from a higher being.
I know that I relate to the world,
and to the energy of others,
and that we are all connected.
I mean that it might be God or
it might be my connection with others,
but I must be still and listen.

It is good to be in a spiritual place.
I feel a sense of awe at times
outdoors, in the country.
Nature and peaceful places
make it easier for me to listen.
Being with friends who understand me.

I am inspired by friends and the works of God in nature (31 January 2005).

I was a teenager when I first felt a sense of awe, that there were miracles all around me. I didn't always see them.
It is good to be in a spiritual place. The best places for me are natural outdoor places and gardens of harmony and beauty. Spirit Valley has inspired me for 15 years. When we trimmed the conifers in the woods there, it felt like a cathedral. My gardens are heaven on earth. And now we have Ignatius.
I think there are moments of spirituality at church--the atmosphere, the music and readings, and some good vibrations from others there. But church can be hard for my system with all the noise and busyness.
I think it helps when people listen more. I think reaching out and asking what we need. I want church friends who will smile to me and say hello and sit with me sometimes. I want to invite some new church friends to my home for tea and a board game or walk, so they understand more what it's like to be me and how they can help (March 2005, October 2006).

In my mind, a church should always be inclusive (August 2002). But perhaps we have to show the way to include people who are different. I had an idea of a spirituality group in January 2004. This is what I said: I want poetry to be read and some prayers to be discussed and music and some mood things. How can we set the mood for spirituality to happen? Perhaps some pretty coloured cloth on a table--only quiet natural

colours. Indoors or outdoors if the weather is good. A focusing idea at the beginning. Perhaps some brain gym and yoga would help. There could be prayers of healing and help for people who are sad or sick. I'd like to see what might happen. Let's talk with others. Andrew Foster might tell more about how Iona helps his spirituality.

A place of peace

(15 February 2006)

I come to Ignatius,
to have time with friends,
to meet in a quiet place that
is not disturbed by cars and crowds.
I work in the Courtyard and
I am calm because of the quiet peace.
I'm in a special place
of God and nature and history.
I know there is Jesuit history
and native history there.

Many of my friends
are autistic
and so am I.
It means we are people
who are sensitive to noise and
nervous at times
with crowds of people.
Lights, traffic and pollution are problems
we have to deal with every day.
But at Ignatius we have a sanctuary.

Pioneering a good whole life

We started to realize my plan 9-10 years ago, with two main assets, which are great blessings in my life. One was getting some individualized funding and the power to choose the support people and resources that help me to do my best. The other was my parents' gift of my home, with the willingness of Guelph Services for the Autistic to be my housing trust, with respect for my person-centred life.

It is another blessing that I can communicate my worries and bright ideas. My family and friends continue to listen to me--to learn what it's like to live with autism and what I need and want for a good whole life. Because we are a very small family, it's so wonderful that our friends help.

In 2000, I became very anxious about how my life would be supported in future. I want to talk about fear. I am terrified when night comes and I fear that I will be left alone. The thing I am scared about is seeing the day my parents die. I believe that we must move as quickly..... to get things moving. I really want to feel secure... to know who will live here (10 April 2000). I'm concerned about my future security. I need to know my means of support. I need to know that there is a safety system (8 November 2000).

My friends have responded in two main ways--by incorporating Friends of Andrew Bloomfield to be a legal entity of personal empowerment and support, and also by thinking through with me the qualities of people I need to support me.

The strategies we have been pioneering are interesting to other people who are different or vulnerable. I am keen to help by sharing my experience. These are some of my thoughts about strategies that work for me or that I still need.

Individualized Funding

(May 2005)

I like to be a pioneer
but it is too slow and scary sometimes.
I have lots of good people in my life.
My aroha and GSA will go on
supporting me after my parents die.

I think IF has made
all the difference for me.

I might tell people
that it is essential to get IF,
because it is the only way
to give people choices and options.

We must have the freedom
to have our own life,
choose our own path,
choose our own supports.

I think we need to know
we can provide
for our own supporters,
so we can choose good ones.

Homesharers are part of my plan

I want to live in my house forever.
I want to mind my own life as much as possible.
I need to lessen dependence on my parents.
I need people to count on (24 January 2001).
I want to have a good life with independence and support when I need it (15 February 2002).

I want to feel that the people in my house are here for me, not because the rent is cheap. I think it will be clear by the way they react to me and by the greetings and interactions. I think I will know after two real meetings and maybe a trial overnight or weekend. Homesharers should be interested in the environment, so the house will be run by people who care like me. I want loving people. In my mind loving people is loving God. I want to be able to teach but not be a guinea pig. I like to think I can inspire others (24 August 2000).

I think the homesharers should be different from each other, but have some beliefs and interests in common. I think it is important that they be dear to me—that they devote time to getting to know me and my needs. Some understanding and willingness to learn. Their life philosophies, caring about the environment and about others. Spirituality is essential. Balance--knowing when to encourage and when to support. I think lifestyle is the key (24 April 2002).

I'm ready to talk more about homesharing. I want to say that it is hard to wait for an imagined person, to prepare for someone unknown. Only one Elizabeth (8 January 2003).

I need good homesharers and friends who listen to and understand me; I need more people to talk with me using FC. I want them to ask me questions and I can answer them. I need some framework. I could attend board meetings of GSA, with a supporter next to me. I think to sit there without talking is hard. I might want to say something at the time, though I am always happy to consider and respond to questions in advance. I want the GSA Board and FAB to know it is important that more people try to support me with FC (12 February 2003).

Having a part-time homesharer this past summer, I felt like I had a companion and a friend. I liked having her live here because it felt like family. I liked knowing that my mother wasn't the only person I could depend on. I became more able to see another person as a companion. I put myself in a position of control. I led the way more. I really liked being out in the community more. I did more and I felt good about it. She was a good fit. I need quiet calm people and lively ones too--lively but not loud! (27 August 2003).

I am worried about all the time my mother gives me. When does she have time for Elizabeth? (28 September 2000). I'm concerned about my future security. I need to know my means of support. I need to know that there is a safety system (8 November 2000). Please listen, time is precious. I want to talk about the hard times. I think that the hardest thing is being so dependent on my mother. The general way I need her to run things. I like the idea of training others to co-ordinate things, to teach me that I can count on others besides my parents (7 March 2001).

The anchor idea is perfect--like a mother helping to keep things running but not being my only friend. I think it is important for the anchor to be older than me but not too old. Build relationship first. Anchor person (or even couple, but no babies!) must know who I am. Yes it's like dating before marriage. Need to be organized but flexible. Not like wardens. I need to be central to the house. I know I won't be the only one but the central one. Taking responsibility for my special diet is essential. It is like my hostess. It will be hard to replace Elizabeth in that way but we must be ready to accept new ways.

I think the anchor person must come first. Others might come and go more. We need to try to get the marriage first. As well as essential requirements, a list of maybes could go along [not given here]. I like this conversation. It is fun to imagine my perfect anchor woman (8 May 2002).

Friends of Andrew Bloomfield

I need to make and keep friends. How can I find friends to share interests, spend time with me, and not depend so much on Gerry and Elizabeth? (23 November 2000).

Listening to my appeals for help to have a longterm safety net, my friends and parents moved to create a special entity which was incorporated in February 2002. Friends of Andrew Bloomfield (FAB for short) is what we call an Aroha from the Maori (Aotearoa/New Zealand) word for love, caring, friendship, commitment,

empathy and community in active rather than just abstract ways. An Aroha resembles a Microboard (in BC and some other places) or "self-directed support corporation" (in some US states).

FAB is the legally incorporated core of my circle of friends, with three of my close friends as directors as well as Gerry, Elizabeth and I. It is dedicated to my personal empowerment and support—now and in the future, when my parents are not here. FAB has the legal powers to ensure that available resources and supports are used for my good life, in keeping with my wishes and needs. FAB can devise and carry out creative strategies and manage resources in empowering and accountable ways.

Above all, FAB makes sure that I have ways to understand options and make decisions about my life, through a supported decision-making agreement—that both keeps me safe and respects my choices. We have a clause that lets me plan for periods when I may be temporarily frozen and unable to make my own decisions.

I feel good knowing about FAB. I know my future is safer. Proud to feel I'm a pioneer.

I want to have a good life with independence and support when I need it. I will pledge to do my part—to be as self-sufficient as possible, to teach others to support me, to be patient while others are learning. I'm not patient but I try to be practical. Our inclination is to be impatient! (15 February 2002).

Looking ahead

I want to talk about my will.
I need you to list the things I own--my bedroom furniture, everything in the Relaxation Room and the learning room, my computers, exercise equipment, weaving loom, all my books and music.
All my friends could choose something to remember me by. Books and music and anything not claimed by friends should go to the farm or a community concerned with autism.
I want my brain and organs to be given for research. My brain may be my most valuable possession.
To carry out my will, I want Gerry and Elizabeth if I die first, but if later then my friends who are FAB directors. They are the people who should make decisions for me, if I am too ill or unable to communicate, but they need to know what I want.
I want my parents and FAB friends to make decisions if I can't. I say now what I want. I need to know my choices and to be able to keep talking. I need to keep making younger friends, in case I live a long time.
I want to die while I have some life in me. I don't want to be miserable. I don't want to be kept alive if I'm on a machine--not at all.
About any money I have, I think one big donation is a good idea. The environment affects us all, so it's like giving to everyone.
(22 December 2004)

Later codicil about the money: Most of all, I want to help Bridges Over Barriers.

Dreaming of what might be

(June 2005)

I am dreaming of a place
where we can come together,
to be together,
to communicate together.

I am dreaming of a place,
where I can be a leader
and a friend,
a person who helps
and a person who needs help.

I want to dream with you, my friend,
to build that bridge you told me about,
because we both like bridges.

Dream with me,
and we will make that place I dream of,
and the bridge in your dreams.

Bridges Over Barriers

I began to tell more people about my dream in summer and fall 2005, to grow out of the FC Gathering I had been hosting for about 18 months..... (17 August 2005)

I want to say that FC is so important that I'm in the mood to start something. I want to start a place of refuge and organization for FC and life planning and autism. I'm thinking about my Autism Project I want to organize. I want to see more training for people to communicate.

This is really my dream. Here goes. I want to be in a place where I can greet friends, host meetings, teach about FC and other things that help us. For now, it can be based in my home. Later it must be bigger. I have to tell you that this is really my idea. This is so happy-making. First the FC Gathering and then the world.

We would not necessarily live together, but some of us might like to live closer. We would welcome people who use FC and other communication strategies. It is about building bridges, not walls. I want to share this dream as I think we have become important to each other in a powerful way. I think that our FC gatherings can be made more regular and frequent. We can talk more often online or email. We can teach others. I want to share my dream with you and ask what you think.

My friends on the GSA Board kindly agreed to shelter Bridges while we get going, and in 2006 we have produced two newsletters. This is how I described Bridges in asking people to support us:

Bridges over Barriers is a centre for friends and family who share the challenges of autism to come together to share support, ideas and community. Bridges is the beginning of an idea for us to build on a small community of adults with autism who have been meeting a few times a year since January 2004. We have been developing our skills as communicators and sharing technology ideas and friendship.

I am really serious about this!

We want to extend this community of pioneers to include more people. We would like there to be more opportunities for others to benefit from our experience, and to encourage and train more people to support those of us with communication and movement disorders.

(Appeal to possible donors): I have an idea I want to tell you about. I am an autistic man. I don't speak with my voice, but I have a voice to express in a different way. I have a friend who helps me communicate. We want to start a centre to help others the way she helps me. But it is not possible to do this in the world of agencies that we have already. There isn't enough money to help people like us. We need to be helped to communicate and when we do, it helps us improve our lives.

When I learned how to communicate in a new way, when I learned to use FC, I had a whole new world open. I knew I could think and was smart. I had no way to tell anyone except my eyes and behavior. I was angry, frustrated and worried a lot. Now I have a way of communicating and, though I am still autistic, life is better (3 August 2005).

(Thanks to a supporter):
I'm hoping our Bridges reach many others.
I am glad you like the project.
I like the idea of being a torch bearer,
or an Indian summoning the storm.
I will keep going with my family and friends
to get FC out of the closet (3 December 2005).

Reaching out

Because I could be very isolated, I try to keep informed about the welfare of people and the planet (21 December 2005). I follow the news, continue to read and learn, and try to imagine things I cannot experience myself. But.....

Autism is a narrow window

(27 September 2006)

It is dangerous and sometimes sad
for people with narrow views
to say too much on a stage.
Autism is a narrow window
to see the world from.

Hope *(21 December 2005)*

Hope is in my heart:
it lives in me
and is my prayer.
It is my prayer for all I love.
For you, my friend,
and all our friends,
I hope for the best.

Recently, I heard about a Toronto mother of a young child diagnosed with autism, who wanted to reach people with a message of hope rather than doom. Estée was organizing presentations of art and other forms of creative expression by autistic people. She was criticized by people who think there is no joy in autism and that people

with autism should be cured and fixed rather than accepted. I was moved to write this poem:

Acceptance for acceptors

(13 September 2006)

I read the news,
that in this world,
we fear.....
the homeless,
the depressed,
the different.

I am here and I am different:
no need to fear me.

I hear there is a new friend
who has a message:
"Accept everyone," she says.
"Accept those of us who are autistic."

I wonder if you will accept
what she is telling you,
or think she is just a mother in denial.

Listen and be moved!

I hope you will listen and be moved by my thoughts and words in this book.

Bibliography of Andrew:

A Portrait of Andrew as a young man (video of Andrew's life and plan, produced by Monica Carsience), 1997.

About Myself: Portrait of Andrew who has autism (by Lucie Milne with the Bloomfield family), 1998, revised edition 2003.

Listening to Andrew (video about how Andrew communicates, featuring Martha Leary, Elizabeth Bell and Beth Komito-Gottlieb), 2000.

"Loving people is loving God: Autism and spirituality," (article by Andrew Foster with Andrew Bloomfield in *The Presbyterian Record)*, May 2005.

"I am host in my home... I am whole and have hope," (article by Elizabeth Bloomfield, published in Autism Ontario manual, *Living with ASD: adolescence and beyond*, pp. 257-266), 2006.

More about strategies in Andrew's good life may be found on the Ontario Adult Autism Research & Support Network website at http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/

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If you would like to contribute to Andrew's vision of Bridges Over Barriers, please send your gift (payable to Guelph Services for the Autistic, with Bridges on the memo line) to:
GSA Treasurer (Bridges)
16 Caribou Cr, Guelph, ON, Canada, N1E 1C9
Gifts of $25 or more qualify for official tax-creditable receipts in Canada.
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